

Centre for Native Education
Biennial Report 2001-2003

by Manon Tremblay, Coordinator
Centre for Native Education

December 17, 2003

Foreword

The Centre for Native Education, a division of Advocacy and Support Services, offers support services to Concordia University's First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. It also offers services to potential students who are interested in pursuing studies at Concordia University.

Student population

Trends in the Aboriginal student population at Concordia are staying the course. Previous academic years had, for example, registered a much higher percentage of women than men undertaking post-secondary studies. During the 2001-2002 academic year, of 158 registered students, 70% were female (111) as compared to 30% male students (47). In 2002-2003, the percentage of female students rose slightly to 73% while the male population decreased proportionately to 27%.

The average age of the student population also remained steady at 34 years, a slight increase from the previous academic year's average of 33 years.

Unfortunately, the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 academic years have registered more decreases in the Aboriginal student population and early statistics for the 2003-2004 academic year don't bode well. After several years of increase, the Aboriginal student population reached a plateau in 1998-99 and has been decreasing ever since as can be seen below:

1995-96	64 students
1996-97	146 students
1997-98	176 students
1998-99	178 students
1999-2000	180 students
2000-2001	153 students
2001-02	158 students
2002-03	146 students

Consequently, the number of visits to the Centre for Native Education has also decreased. During the academic year 2000-2001, the Centre received 3322 visits. In 2002-2003, the number of visits was down to 1791. It is clear, from these numbers that a strategy must be planned and implemented in order to reverse the trend and reestablish a strong Aboriginal presence on campus.

External funding

In January 2002, the Centre for Native Education was encouraged by the Ministère de l'Éducation to apply for additional funding to help create and maintain services for Aboriginal students. A formal application for funds was made in February 2002 for \$179 000. The Ministère approved our request for funding and awarded \$173 000 to the Centre for Native Education over a period of five years. The first installment of \$15 000 was received during the fall of 2002. Another installment of \$15 000 is expected in the fall of 2003.

Funds from the MEQ have been targeted to improve the facilities at the Centre for Native Education; develop promotional tools to promote Concordia University and recruit potential students; create student employment and organize special activities. It is hoped that the funds received from the MEQ can be used to in strategies to help boost the numbers of Aboriginal students who attend Concordia University as well as help in their retention.

In September 2002, funds were also applied for and received from the New Student Programme to help with orientation activities. The Centre for Native Education received \$1 500.

Space and equipment

The Centre for Native Education continues to occupy the third and fourth floors of the V annex on the SGW campus. During the 2002-2003 academic year, funds received from the Ministère de l'Éducation have been used to improve this space to make it more comfortable for students and more conducive to learning. Thanks to the Ministère, new lounge furniture, new computer equipment for student use as well as new books for the documentation centre have been purchased.

The working environment at the Centre for Native Education remains, as in former years, a concern. Lack of heat in the winter is a serious problem that has still not been addressed. Every winter, staff must either close the Centre during cold spells or relocate in other buildings. Independent heating units are not only ineffectual, their use is forbidden. The lack of heat during the long winter months is also a serious detriment to student drop-in rates as evidenced by the noticeably fewer visits during the winter term (for example, in 2002-2003, there were 1083 visits during the fall semester and 708 visits during the winter semester). Inversely, the lack of air conditioning in the summer has also forced the staff of the Centre for Native Education to either close the Centre during hot summer days or relocate in cooler buildings. The Environmental Health and Safety Office are aware of the situation and have come many times to take readings but no action has been taken to remedy to the situation. Needless to say, such working environments are affecting the morale of employees and students.

First Peoples Studies

The Centre for Native Education continues to be actively involved in the creation of a new Major in First Peoples Studies. The proposal was essentially completed in August 2003 and forwarded to the Faculty of Arts and Science for comment. The project was favourably received and is slowly going through the necessary steps before the programme is effectively implemented. During the next academic year, the Centre for Native Education will take less of a leadership role as the project is taken over by the Faculty of Arts and Science and the School of Community and Public Affairs, where the new programme is likely to be housed. A copy of the proposal can be obtained through the Centre for Native Education.

Special Activities

In September 2001, thanks to funding from the New Student Programme, the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador

Human Resources Commission, the Centre for Native Education kicked off the year in style with a cultural fair on the Mezzanine of the Hall Building. The event, which featured food, music, dancers and artefacts, attracted over 5000 people.

As in previous years, the Centre for Native Education held orientation sessions for new and returning students. In September 2002, thanks to funds received from the New Student Programme, the Centre was able to offer food, information sessions and campus life workshops to Aboriginal Students. Since Orientation 2002 had met with considerable success, the same activities were repeated in September 2003. This time, the necessary funds came from the Ministère de l'Éducation. Orientation 2003 was also quite successful in attracting a strong number of Aboriginal students.

In June 2002, the Centre for Native Education held its annual Graduation Dinner and Dance to celebrate the achievements of Aboriginal graduates. The event was a moderate success and the people present enjoyed themselves. Because of the small number of graduates, the astronomical cost of the Graduation Dinner and Dance and the marked lack of interest from 2003 graduates, it was decided to suspend the event for this year.

In October 2002, the Centre for Native Education, in collaboration with the McGill House for First Peoples, hosted a showing of the award winning film *Atanarjuat* followed by a lecture by cinematographer Norman Cohn. The event, held in the De Seve Cinema, was a huge success. The cinema was filled to capacity with people sitting in the aisles.

Lectures, committees and other related activities

During the 2001-2002 academic year, Manon Tremblay was invited by the Quebec Native Women Association to be part of an advisory committee on the proposed bill 143 on Equal Access to Employment. The advisory committee looked at how the new bill would influence career prospects for Aboriginal women and advised provincial delegates accordingly. In January 2002, a training session was held at Concordia University for on-reserve Aboriginal women to advise them of changes to current legislation that this new bill would put into effect. Manon Tremblay gave a lecture on education and the First Nations.

In November 2001, Manon Tremblay was invited by instructor Pat O'Rourke to give a lecture on Aboriginal spiritual practices in the course RELI 3 Religion and Healing.

In February 2002, Manon Tremblay was invited to participate in *Taking Pulse*, an initiative of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation. *Taking Pulse* brought together 300 members of parliament, corporate CEOs and executives and Aboriginal leaders to examine the problem of Aboriginal drop out rates and how the corporate sector and the federal government could help promote post-secondary education. The event was held in Calgary. Another meeting is scheduled to be held in Toronto in the fall of 2003.

In March 2002, Manon Tremblay was invited by the Fédération des femmes du Québec for a second lecture on Aboriginal women. The first lecture was given in June of the previous year and was on the topic of Aboriginal women before European Contact. The second lecture was on Aboriginal women post-contact.

In May 2002, Manon Tremblay was invited by Terres en Vues and the City of Montreal to be part of the selection committee for the awarding of bursaries from the Fondation du Maire de Montréal pour la Jeunesse. The committee reviewed bursary applications, interviewed candidates and awarded bursaries to the most deserving projects.

In September 2002, Manon Tremblay was invited to give a lecture at the Centre des femmes de Montréal on the topic of Aboriginal Women as part of a series of lectures on multiculturalism.

In October 2002, Manon Tremblay was invited to give a lecture in instructor Deidre Butler's course RELI Death and Dying. The lecture was on traditional practices and beliefs of the Plains Cree surrounding death.

In November 2002, the Centre for Native Education invited Rose Fleury, a Metis elder, to come and speak to Aboriginal students. Students loved Mrs Fleury's stories and advice on various questions.

In January 2003, Manon Tremblay was invited to participate in a two-day Aboriginal Graduate Recruitment Initiative at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa. Educators from across Canada were on hand to learn about employment opportunities in Canada's embassies and consulates. The information gathered was widely distributed to Aboriginal students.

In February 2003, Manon Tremblay was invited by Dr. Sima Aprahamian to give a lecture in her class WSDB 498 Women's Organizing, Resistance and Change. The lecture was on Aboriginal women's struggles.

Also in February 2003, Manon Tremblay gave a lecture in Dr. Sheila Sullivan Brown's course EDUC 426 Comparative Education on the topic of residential schools.

In March 2003, Manon Tremblay was invited to speak before the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Youth on the topic of education, urban life and obstacles faced by Aboriginal youth who undertake post-secondary studies. The final report was published in October 2003. A copy of the report can be consulted at the Centre for Native Education.

Also in March 2003, Manon Tremblay was invited to give a lecture in instructor Deidre Butler's course RELI Religions of the West. The lecture was on Cree religious beliefs.

In May 2003, Manon Tremblay was invited by Canada Post Head Office to discuss their Aboriginal Employment initiative and retention of Aboriginal employees.

Conferences and Professional Development

In August 2002, Manon Tremblay attended the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Morley, Alberta. This conference addresses education issues faced by all Aboriginal peoples and attracts over 6 000 delegates from all over the world. At this conference, Manon Tremblay was able to network extensively with other Aboriginal educators and service providers as well as learn more about what other countries and post-secondary institutions are doing to help their students stay on track.

In May 2003, Manon Tremblay undertook suicide prevention training with Living Works, an organization specializing in applied suicide intervention skills training. This training was particularly helpful since the Aboriginal population has the highest rate of attempted and completed suicide in Canada. Since then, Manon Tremblay has been able to identify two cases of students with suicidal ideation and referred them to the appropriate agencies for help.

In June 2003, Manon Tremblay attended the CACUSS conference at the University of British Columbia. It was the first time that Aboriginal issues in student services were brought to the forefront and Manon Tremblay was an active participant in the many discussions that were held among Aboriginal delegates who were pondering official status within CACUSS. Manon Tremblay also attended a number of workshops and took the opportunity to visit the First Nations House of Learning and meet with her colleagues there to discuss Aboriginal student services.

Conclusion

The Centre for Native Education continues to offer support services to Concordia's Aboriginal students, a population that is decreasing. In the next coming years, special focus on strategies to attract and retain Aboriginal students will be needed in order to ensure the survival of the Centre. It is our belief that with the proper tools and the right help from various university departments, we can bring our numbers back up and establish a clear Aboriginal presence at Concordia.